



PRIORITIES FOR ENSURING ACCESS TO CLEAN, SAFE, AFFORDABLE, & RELIABLE DRINKING WATER FOR US RESIDENTS

Recommendations from Great Lakes Community Leaders—March 2020

CLEAN, SAFE, AFFORDABLE, & RELIABLE DRINKING WATER IS A BASIC NEED.

Invest in drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater infrastructure.

Aging drinking water infrastructure threatens our region's future prosperity and the health of our citizens. Aging, outdated, and over-burdened combined sewer systems release sewage and stormwater into the Great Lakes each year, closing beaches and spreading contaminants and pathogens that pose a substantial threat to public health. And leaking pipes lead to significant waste, in some cases as much as 50% of a system's treated water.

Recommendations: Boost funding for the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund programs and the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act program (WIFA) and increase funding for grants to communities for infrastructure projects; ensure that infrastructure funding requires, incentivizes, and/or supports nature-based solutions that enhance climate resilience; encourage more green infrastructure; promote policies and incentives that increase access to water infrastructure financing and ensure affordable water to all residents; and, when funding local projects, provide training, employment, contracting and other economic opportunities to low-income community residents.

Adopt public health standards that prohibit water shutoffs.

Declining populations, toxic contamination and decaying infrastructure in large urban centers have resulted in water and sewer rates that are unaffordable for many low-income residents, and government directed shutoffs contribute to water-related illnesses. A recent study found a significant connection between City of Detroit government-imposed water

shutoffs and water-related illnesses (skin and soft-tissue infections and water borne bacterial infections). Patients diagnosed at Henry Ford Hospital with skin and soft tissue diseases were 1.48 times more likely to live on a block that has experienced water shutoffs. A current example of the dire consequences that could result to residents from water shut offs is that Great Lakes cities are currently systematically conducting water shut offs while a global pandemic is reaching the U.S. and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is highlighting hand washing as an important preventative action for spreading disease.

Recommendation: Institute a national policy that provides a disincentive for municipal water systems to engage in systematic shutoffs.

Establish a national standard for affordable water rates.

For well over a decade, the EPA has used 4.5% of monthly household income as the standard to evaluate water and sewer rate affordability (2% for just drinking water). The United Nations Development Program uses a standard of 3%. Drinking water rates in the United States include, large disparities by race, class, and geography. The Great Lakes region is home to many cities still coping with depopulation and deindustrialization, leaving water systems with dwindling revenue and daunting infrastructure repair costs. Low-income residents affected by these historical trends should not be asked to pay a disproportionate amount of their income for this vital resource.

Recommendations: Incorporate water affordability measures into any infrastructure package, such as funding grants not loans for disadvantaged communities; support for programs that help low income households pay their water bills; and, incentives for utilities to adopt more equitable water and sewer rate structures.

Protect drinking water quality and safety.

EPA plays key roles in identifying contaminants for regulation, overseeing compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act, developing laboratory methods and working with states, tribes and local entities to implement health-based drinking water regulations and assist water systems. In fact, the EPA played a critical role in revealing the lead contamination in Flint.

Recommendations: Ensure the EPA's budget is fully funded; adequate resources are devoted to the enforcement of the Safe Drinking Water Act; strengthen the Lead and Copper Rule; funds are available to revise and implement the Lead and Copper Rule; funds are available for additional monitoring of source water; increase agency transparency of information and data; and, pass the PFAS Action Act of 2019.

Curb toxic algae that is polluting our drinking water.

In 2014, approximately half-a-million Toledo residents were told not to use their tap water for nearly 3 days. Toxin concentrations, more toxic than cyanide, from an algal bloom in Lake Erie made the city's water too dangerous to use, sending people scrambling to find bottled water, which quickly sold out in the metro-area, parts of southeast Michigan, and throughout Ohio. These toxic algal blooms are largely a result of polluted run-off from large-scale industrial farms further upstream. It is time we stop subsidizing farmers for harmful practices while we require already overly burdened communities to clean-up their drinking water.

Recommendations: Require conservation best management practices to curb polluted runoff from farm fields for any Farm Bill subsidies; and, increase investments in monitoring to ensure practices are meeting improvements in water quality.

Require oversight of pipelines transversing the Great Lakes Region.

There are more than 1,900 miles of pipelines stretching throughout the Great Lakes region. In 2010, an Enbridge pipeline ruptured near the Kalamazoo River releasing an excess of 1 million gallons of thick tar sand oil, causing a do not drink tap water advisory and forcing people out of their homes. Line 5 is one of the pipelines that runs along the Great Lakes lake bed, a source of drinking water for more than 40 million Americans, and is owned by Enbridge. Line 5 has had a number of repeated disclosures of shoddy maintenance, structural flaws in their pipelines and the company has concealed critical information from officials. An oil spill in the Great Lakes is estimated to cost \$6.3 billion in damages to water treatment plants, natural resources, coastal property values, and jeopardize millions of people's drinking water.

Recommendation: Finalize regulations that increase inspections and leak detection technology on pipelines, while increasing oversight and compliance of pipes that transverse our lakes, rivers, and streams.